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Alternative food networks: from social movements to market mainstreaming and beyond..? Reflections on the historical development of the Danish organic movement

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Table of contents

Abstract

The organic movement has its roots in a critical stance towards the capitalist development of farming and food systems and poses in that sense an “alternative” to “conventional” food systems. The paper aims at exploring how alternative organic food networks are and which meaning the notions of “alternative” and “conventional” carries, using the historical development in Denmark as an example. From the 1970’s and onwards, organic food networks in Denmark have evolved from being primarily a (marginalised) social movement, and on to being included in the market mainstream. The social and spatial settings for organic food networks in Denmark have thus been significantly altered. Using debates on “conventionalization” of organic food systems as the starting point, it will be argued in the paper that the recent development in Denmark points towards the establishment of new organisational innovations, which transcends established dichotomies between notions like “alternative” and “mainstream”. Important elements in the recent development include utilisation of new means of consumption like e-commerce. The approach for the study integrates production, distribution, retailing and consumption in a relational approach, informed by the figurational sociology of Elias, as well as the structuration theories of Giddens and Bourdieu.

Keywords

Organic movement; alternative food networks; Denmark; conventionalisation; alternative and mainstream

Introduction: 'the fall of organics'?

The development of organic and various other forms of 'alternative' food networks have been the subject of extensive research within the field of agro-food studies during the past 10-20 years. During the before mentioned period, organic food has gained an increasing food market share and a wide number of Western countries, among them Denmark, can thus be termed 'mature' organic markets. The 'maturation' process, whereby the organic movement evolves from being a marginal social movement and into being an integrated part of the established food system is at first glance an obvious example of the cooptation of an alternative into the established mainstream.

The first question in our inquiry was thus to ask, whether the Danish case could be told in the same manner: Was it a story of an alternative gradually being transformed into what it originally opposed, namely the conventional food system? The next obvious question was thus to ask, how 'alternative' was the 'alternative' really?

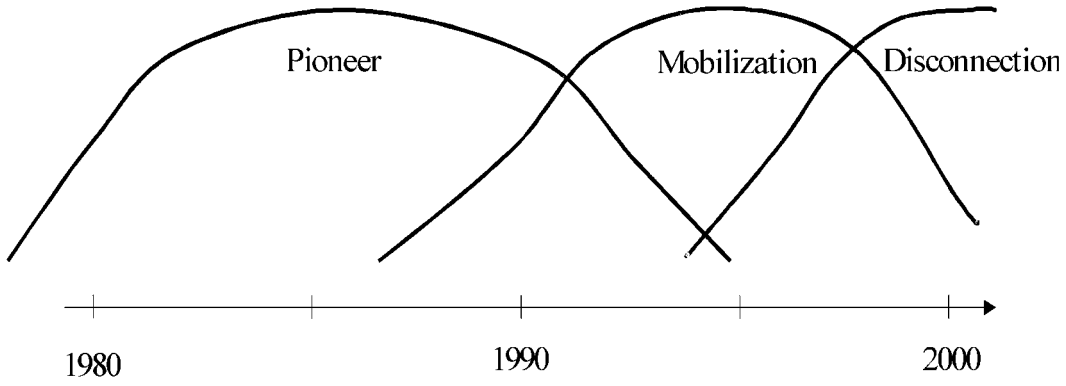
What then caught our attention, was that a lot of existing studies within agro-food scientific literature also operated with a binary distinction between the 'mainstream' food system and 'alternative' food networks and tended to portray the development of organic food systems as a process of shifting from one initial phase of 'alternativeness' into a later phase of conventionalisation or mainstreaming. Below we have tried to capture some of the elements which could fit into this binary conceptualisation.

Figure 1: A binary conceptual scheme of the development of organic food networks (Kjeldsen, 2005)

Following the logic of this binary distinction, the mainstreaming process should thus be a process of evolving from embedded economies and on to disembedded economies, in the Polanyian sense (Polanyi, 1957; Jessop, 2001), characterised by a dominance of the economic over the social. The number of other possible dichtomies which can be attributed to this binary logic is virtually endless: from the social to the economic, from the local to the global,

from small scale to large scale, from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* and so on. The actual debate within the agro-food scientific literature can be attributed some of the possible dichotomisations mentioned above. One significant contribution to the debate has been the formulation of the 'conventionalisation hypothesis', which empirically is based on studies of the evolution of organic food systems in California (Buck, Getz & Guthman, 1997; Guthman, 1998; Guthman, 2004) and in Ireland (Tovey, 1997). The structure of the hypothesis is that it assumes that when organic food systems increase their scale, they will gradually be embedded into the conventional food system, thus erasing the distinctive features of organic products. This process entails a higher degree of professionalizing on the production side, large-scale units throughout the food chain, vertical integration processes, a predominance of production contracts, lesser shares of the value added for farmers and an increased focus on price and volume in the retail sector (Hall & Mogyorody, 2001). Other studies in the same vein have pointed towards the decoupling of organic values from the mainstream during the evolution of organic food systems in Denmark (Noe, 2003a; Noe, 2003b). The former study portrays the Danish case as a movement towards disconnection with the organic core values:

Figure 2: Three phases in the development of the networks of the organic movement
(Noe, 2002)



A recent historical study in Denmark, argues that the Danish organic movement must choose between returning to its initial radical political values or otherwise lead a quiet life in the supermarkets, where most of the distinct features of organic products will be erased (Jacobsen, 2005a; Jacobsen, 2005b). Taken as a whole, these studies convey a picture of the 'fall of organics' where the entry into the mainstream market is seen as negative.

In the debate following the initial formulation of the conventionalisation hypothesis, there have also been more pragmatic viewpoints. One examples is a study from Canada which concluded that the degree of conventionalisation was highly dependent on particular product chains and could thus not be attributed across all parts of the organic food system (Hall & Mogyorody, 2001). Studies from New Zealand point towards organics as a field, where several economic spaces co-exist (Coombes & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Coombes, 1999; Campbell & Liepins, 2001). Danish studies on values in organic farming have concluded that there is still a high degree of diversity within the movement and that the modernisation process can not be said to be all-encompassing (Kristensen & Nielsen, 1997; Kaltoft, 1999; Kaltoft, 2001). Surveys among Danish organic farmers have also revealed a widespread consciousness about being in opposition to conventional agriculture (Michelsen, 2001; Michelsen & Rasmussen, 2003) One of the problems in the conventionalisation debate has been that dif-

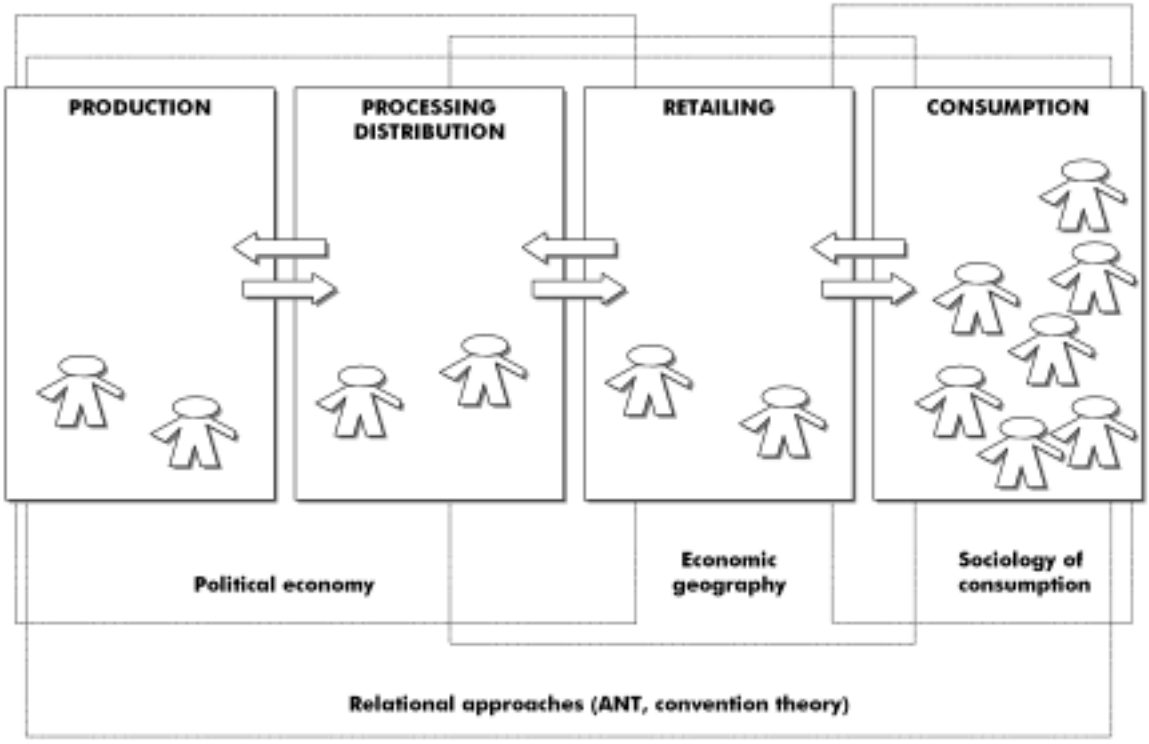
ferent indicators have been used by the individual contributors, as well as different analytical scales, thus making it difficult to come to any clear conclusions whether the conventionalisation hypothesis has universal validity. As a result of this, the hypothesis can neither be falsified nor verified, which does reduce its value as a useful hypothesis. This aspect has been critiqued elsewhere in the debate on the conventionalisation hypothesis (Coombes & Campbell, 1998).
Another issue regarding the conventionalisation hypothesis is that there among the above mentioned is a clear majority among the different approahces which focus only at the production side of the food chain. A few have dealt with policy and retail sector issues and hardly any have dealt with organic consumption and the possible degree of conventionalisation of the organic consumer. In that manner, there was a disciplinary bias which might have overlooked important dynamics within organic food networks, especially on the consumption side.

But what is most important, is that the hypothesis does use a binary logic, which inevitably steps into the pitfall of describing the evolution of organic food networks as a gradual convergence from one pristine state of grassroots idealism on to inclusion to a formal market economy, with more or less invariant characteristics, even though evolution takes place in historical time and in absolute space.

A relational approach to the Danish case

When constructing an approach to answer the question of the degree of 'alternativeness' which could be attributed to Danish organic food networks, the approach should be able to capture evolutionary dynamics in historical time (as the area of inquiry was the historical development), as well as it should not omit certain aspects, such as consumption, purely as a result of disciplinary biases. When reviewing various approaches, it became apparent that what could be termed relational approaches seemed very well fitted for the task, considering that they did not have the same bias of focus of focusing on parts of the food chain on the cost of others (Kjeldsen, 2005). Viewing food systems as relational networks also have the strength of integrating both structure and agency perspectives in the approach, since networks are being depicted as both social and structural (Dicken, Kelly, Olds & Wai-Chung Yeung, 2001).

Figure 3: Approaches to analysing food networks
(Kjeldsen, 2005)



The methodology used in the study thus utilised a relational perspective, inspired by the figurational sociology of Elias (Featherstone, 1987; Kilminster, 1987; van Krieken, 2002) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). Following in the vein of these authors, it is assumed that food networks when viewed as a social form, is inseparable from social practice. It follows from this assumption, that food networks can not be analysed using context-independent, invariant, singular analytical terms like 'the organic food system'. It has been argued in other studies of the agricultural sustainability movements, that it is hard to find any singular unifying concept which can describe these movements:

> "..there is actually no such thing as a sustainable agriculture movement. By this I mean that despite the range of possible appeals for achieving a greater degree of agricultural sustainability, there is no

> one underlying notion or strategy that can serve as a singular unifying focus for the movement." (Buttel, 1997:353)

Still, in the Danish context, attempts have been made to define 'common values' for organic farming, which aimed at unifying the various organic agriculture movements' perspectives on organic farming. One such example can be found in a report from the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming and Food Systems (FØJO, 2000). The report suggests that a consensus should be made on three basic principles of organic agriculture: precaution, recycling and nearness. It is argued in the report, that:

> "..The debate on how to develop organic farming should thus also focus on clarifying what organic farming really is. This could facilitate the development of less complicated rules of organic farming.." (FØJO, 2000:7)

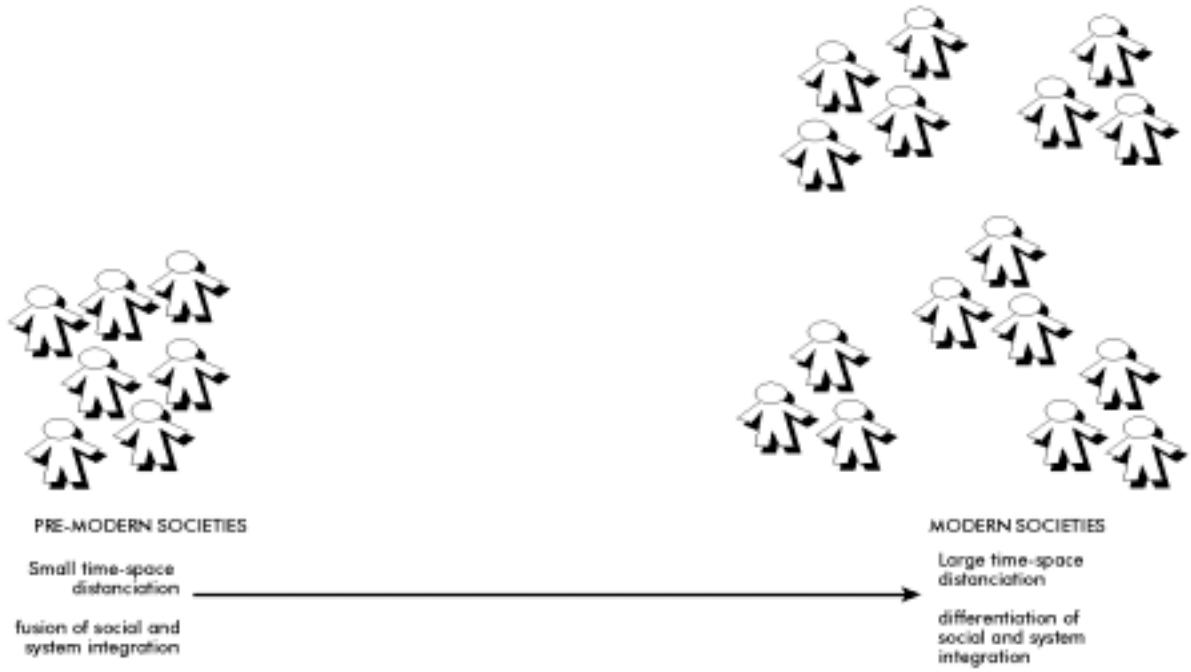
In a functional perspective, it is hard to disagree with these principles . But the process of defining what organic agriculture 'really is' is problematic, given the level of diversity within the movement in terms of values. Some have even argued that the only unifying principle which can be found in the history of the Danish organic movement, is the negative principle of being in opposition to conventional farming (Ingemann, 2003b; Lynnerup, 2003). One critical point to make is that, a consensus-oriented and essentialistic approach like the one mentioned above, tends to ignore that 'common values' are being established by power. Given that possibility, 'common values' does not express much else than the self-description of the powerful, something which Bourdieu has demonstrated within the field of political science (Bourdieu, Wacquant & Harage, 1994).

In relation to that, it makes more sense to approach organic food networks as a field. Bourdieu defines a field as a part of social space, which emerges when different actors struggle for something which means something or holds value for them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). Bourdieu defines a field as a network or a configuration of objective relations between different positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996:84-85). These positions are objectively defined by their existence and the bonds which they place upon the actors and institutions which hold the positions. The actual or potential position within a given field must always be seen as related to the distribution of various forms of power (or capital), which gives access to the specific goods or benefits, which are at stake within the field.

Bourdieu's field concept is closely related to his notion of capital, which he divides into economical, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital plays a central part in the dynamics of the field. The 'game' which takes place within the field, can be described as the struggle between various actors to forward the value of the distinct forms of capital they might possess. When playing the game, the various forms of capital are utilised and they can to some degree substitute one another. Bourdieu does underline though, that the various forms of capital are ultimately linked to economic capital, which always will constitute a significant strength within the field (Bourdieu, 1986). Using the field concept in the case of organic food systems, it describes the organic field as a dynamically evolving field, where different actors pursue their distinct notion of what organics should be about (to define the 'rules of the game') and thus also how organic foods should circulate between production and consumption.

Bourdieu's field concept describes interaction between actors in social space as a game, which includes the utilisation of various forms of capital, whose value is determined by the rules of the game. In order to explain changes within the field, it is necessary to focus on how the game is played. Analytically, this involves the mapping of how the configurations of social forms within the field change and analysing what difference these shifts make. A useful tool in that regard is to develop a typology of the social forms within the field. For that purpose, we chose to focus on the various forms of *embeddedness* which could be attributed to the various food networks within the field. It was thus necessary to develop a social ontology of the field, which was picked from the work of Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1984; Giddens, 1990). Some important principles stated by Giddens is that social systems are time-space 'binding' and that actors are coupled by different configurations of presence and absence, what he terms social integration and system integration. Giddens draws the distinction between the two by stating that social integration takes place within a context of co-presence, whereas system integration can happen across large distances in time and space. Giddens emphasize that modern societies are characterised by the stretching of social systems across time and space, a process he terms disembedding. Disembedding thus signifies that social relations are being lifted out of a localised setting and re-established across time and space. Giddens' notion of disembedding therefore differs from Polanyi's, since Giddens is neutral about whether this is good or bad.

Figure 4: Modernity as time-space distanciation
(Giddens, 1984; Giddens, 1990)



Time-space distanciation or disembedding of social relations is facilitated by what Giddens terms *disembedding mechanisms* (Giddens, 1990). Giddens mentions among these mechanisms like money and abstract expert systems, which both facilitates interactions between actors and processes across time and space. Among other disembedding mechanisms, which might be important in the present context, we have picked George Ritzers emphasis on the role of the *means of consumption* (Ritzer, 1999; Ritzer, 2003b) for establishing (altered) social contexts for food networks. Ritzer turns the traditional emphasis of political economy on the importance of means of production upside down, and points towards the importance of consumption in understanding late modern economies. Ritzers 'consumption turn' is not at all unique, but should be seen in accord with the rising interest for consumption across all the social sciences, as it has been noted in recent reviews (Miller, 1995). Disembedding mechanisms and the technologies associated with them, are crucially important for understanding the dynamics of the field, since the actual configuration of social and system integration for a given network to a large degree determines what possibilities can be actualised, as well as what constraints might be important.

These basic concepts can be used to establish some ideal-typical dimensions of the embeddedness of organic food networks and can in that manner be used as a measuring rod when comparing different forms of networks. Ideal-types is here used in the Weberian sense, as an abstraction of phenomenas in the social world:

> "A one-sided, exaggerated concept, usually an exaggeration of the rationality of a given phenomenon, used to analyze the social world in all its historical and contemporary variation. The ideal type is a measuring rod to be used in comparing various specific examples of a social phenomenon either cross-culturally or over time." (Ritzer, 2003a:32)

Our departure for building such a measuring rod is to characterize the social context which is being established when organic foods are being circulated between producers and consumers. In a practical setting the social context of organic food networks exhibit a great deal of heterogenity, ranging from a high degree of formalisation to a low degree of formalisation. In this context, we used a distinction between what convention theory terms standardisation and dedication (Salais & Storper, 1992; Marsden & Arce, 1995; Wilkinson, 1997; Murdoch, Marsden & Banks, 2000; Mansfield, 2003b; Mansfield, 2003a; Renard, 2003; Mansfield, 2004). The difference between the two can be described as:

> "..on the one hand, there are sets of standardized, codified rules and norms that impose conventions across a range of diverse contexts; on the other hand, conventions may emerge from local, personalized, idiosyncratic sets of relations." (Murdoch & Miele, 1999:471)

Practical examples of these two distinctive types can be found in the difference between circulating organic foods through supermarkets with a relatively low degree of social integration between producers and consumers and circulating organic foods through community-based forms of organisations, characterised by a relatively high degree of social integration. In addition to characterizing the social context of a given food network, the spatial configuration should also be included as a second dimension in a typology of forms of embeddedness of food networks. This is in accordance with Giddens' emphasis on the importance of space as a setting for social systems (Giddens, 1984:110-161). But in order to resolve some of the prob-

lems with Giddens' notion of space, a distinction should be made between social space and absolute space. Though Giddens does mention that space also serves a material setting for social systems, most of his emphasis is on space as a social topography, which couples actors in shifting configurations of presence and absence, relative to the degree of system integration. In some of the debates on Giddens' notion of space, critics have pointed out that space can not be reduced to an in principle frictionless social topography, but that its function as a material setting for social systems is of crucial importance (Tonboe, 1993a; Sayer, 2000). The distinction between social and absolute space is challenging analytically, since one has to balance between the environmentalism of the past and the voluntary modernism of the present (Tonboe, 1993a; Tonboe, 1993b). One possible middle ground between these two positions has been proposed by Andrew Sayer, with his distinction between social context-dependence and spatial context-dependence (Sayer, 2000). These concepts signify shifting degrees of importance of space as a material setting for social systems, with social context-dependence signifying a socially determined space, whereas spatial context-dependence signifies a high degree of importance of space as a material setting.

To sum up the discussion, then we have sought to incorporate two ideal-typical dimensions in our typology of embeddedness: (1) the social setting which a given food network constitute in terms of the degree of social integration and (2) the spatial configuration or setting which a given food network constitute in terms of dependence on absolute space.

Figure 5: Social and spatial dimensions of alternative food networks
(modified from (Salais & Storper, 1992; Murdoch & Miele, 1999; Sayer, 2000))

It is important to emphasize, that the model does not operate with an analytical bias towards portraying a low degree of social integration (standardization) as being negative. One very important point in this regard is that standardization can be considered inclusive and as such can be applied across social space, whereas dedication can be considered exclusive and as such only applicable to distinct areas within social space. In that manner, the double concepts of standardization/dedication can be considered as being analytically ambivalent.

The historical development of the Danish Organic Movement

A recent study of the evolution of organic farming in Denmark (Ingemann, 2003b; Ingemann, 2003a) have proposed four different epochs for the period from 1970 to the present: a pioneering phase in the 1970s, a rallying phase in the 1980s, an absorption phase in the 1990s and finally a phase of diversification in the first decade of the new millennium.

Table 1: Phases in the evolution of organic farming in Denmark, 1970s to present
(Ingemann, 2003a)

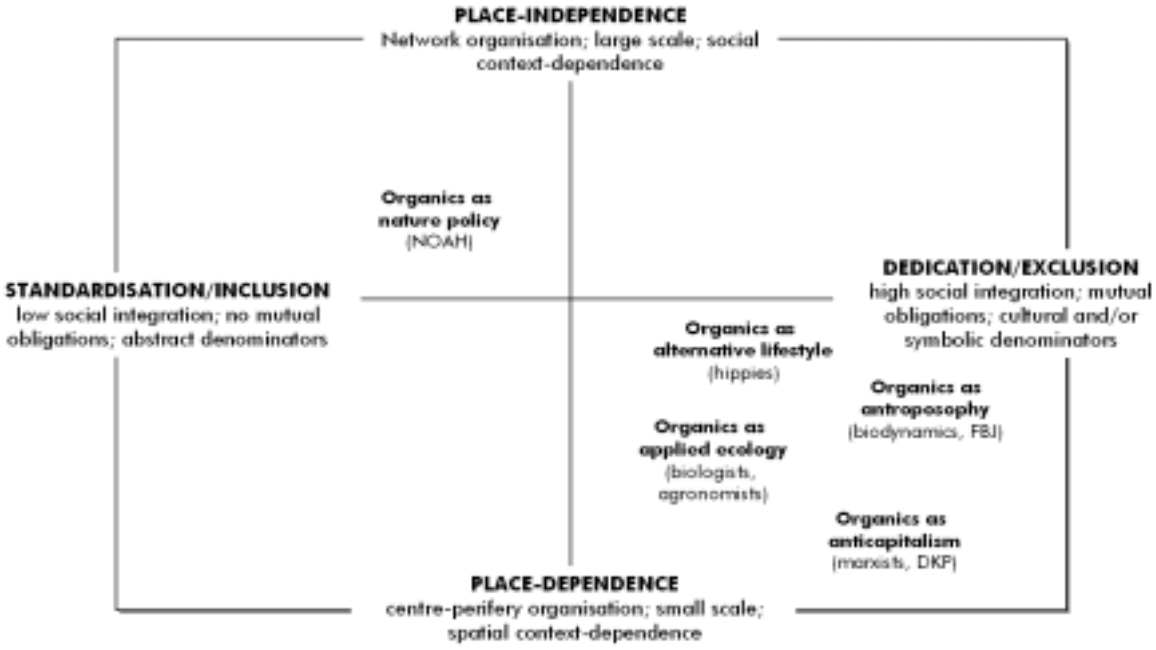
Year	Milestone	Characteristic	Supplementary characteristics
1970s	The first organic farms are established	Grassroots (pioneering)	Huge idealism. The dawning movement is founded as a reaction towards the mainstream evolution and it is in general excluded from the establishment. The movement is characterised by various notions about the ideal direction and core values/principles. Initial efforts to make organic farming work in practice.
1981-1982	The association for organic agriculture and the national school for organic farming established	Rallying by means of separation (Expansion)	The actors who especially focus on farming management gather around the association and the national school; other actors who put more stress on social and political issues gradually experience decreasing power to set the agenda.
1987	Governmental authorisation scheme, followed by the Red Ø label (1990)	Inclusion (Expansion)	Organic farmers establish companies to manage processing of organic foods – however, the period is characterised by a gradual inclusion in the established food-system (including the agro-political and agro-industrial complex) and focus on farm management and how to get more farmers to convert. By the governmental authorisation scheme organic farming is put on the authoritative agenda.
1992	Supermarket chains increase marketing to expand sales of organic foods	Absorption, consolidation (Decreasing rate of expansion)	Until now organic foods have almost "sold themselves". The period is marked by some tendencies towards stagnation in consumer demand but a successful kick-start is obtained through marketing. Organisational consolidation around the organic sector including two organisational lines (one is the association taking care of general interests; the other is an organisational set-up to facilitate production branches and marketing). The two organisational lines are in accordance with the tradition in Danish agro-political and agro-industrial complex.
2002-	?	'Funky Business' New separation and new organisational innovations	Innovation concerning means related to marketing and cooperation among and between producers and consumers, which again delimit (a part of?) the organic food system from the conventional???

In the early days of Danish organic farming back in the 1970s, the (few) people interested in organic farming was associated with an informal and loosely structured study group, the so called Agricultural Study Group. Within the study group, three different groups could be identified (Lynnerup, 2003):

Table 2: Agendas within the Agricultural Study Group in 1970s
(Lynnerup, 2003)

Group	Agenda
Radical socialists	Collective farming as the ideal, inspired by the developments in Eastern Germany; communist politics; collective ownership of means of production; focus on workplace; no distinct focus on environment and health
Edologists	Departure in critique of environmental consequences of industrialized farming; dominated by academics from the agricultural university and biologists from the university; mainly focused on environment and ecology
Hippies	Departure in traditional family values and values of interacting closely with nature; critique of the stress and hastiness of modern life and alienation; healthy mind and bodies in pact with nature; biodynamical theory and practice; alternative life styles

Figure 6: Agendas within the organic field 1970-1980

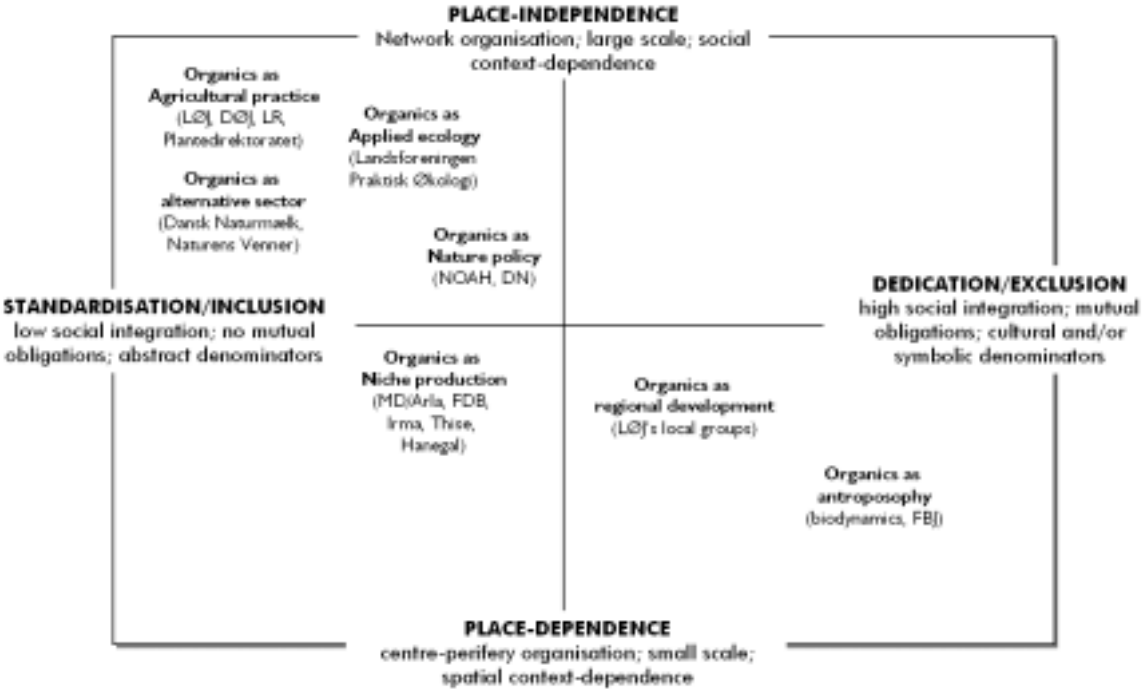


In terms of size of production, organic farming was very small and the interest for organic products was very limited during this period, as organic products were mostly circulated through hippie communities or consumer associations, which picked up the produce directly on the few existing farms. The actors who were active within the field in these days, were embedded in a relatively informal context, which appealed only to very distinct target groups. The interest for organic farming among policy makers were also very limited, with the exception of the Danish environmental movement NOAH, which paid some attention to organic farming as a way to counteract some of the negative environmental consequences of the ongoing modernization of agriculture.

By the early 1980s a process took place within the movement, whereby the more radical agendas pursued by the hippies and the anti-capitalists were gradually excluded from the mainstream of the movement. A national association for organic farming (LØJ) was formed in 1982 and in the same period the biodynamical/anthroposophical farmers formed their own association, thus marking their gradual exclusion from the mainstream as well. The newly initiated national association now became a forum for organic activists who put more emphasis on agricultural issues rather than on the political-economical and social agenda which the hippies and the radical left-wing anti-capitalists had pursued in the preceding decade.

These events initiated an epoch characterized by a significant higher degree of 'sectorialisation' or sectorial integration of organic farming. This new focus within the movement was seen in projects like an organic farming school, which was initiated by an association of organic farmers in the mid 1980s and the initiation of an organic branch within the Danish extension service, which is owned by the national farmer's associations in Denmark. Both of these are institutions which aimed at improving the level of professionalism within organic farming, since there were at the time no distinct courses at the existing farming schools or extension services directed towards farmers or farming students who were interested in organic farming. The organic lobby organizations (LØJ, ØL, Økologiens Hus) also shifted their emphasis during this period, thus shifting from being a grassroot movement, financed by the organic farmers themselves, and into being a mostly state-sponsored (through project grants) NGO, which advanced what can be termed as a 'green' sector policy.

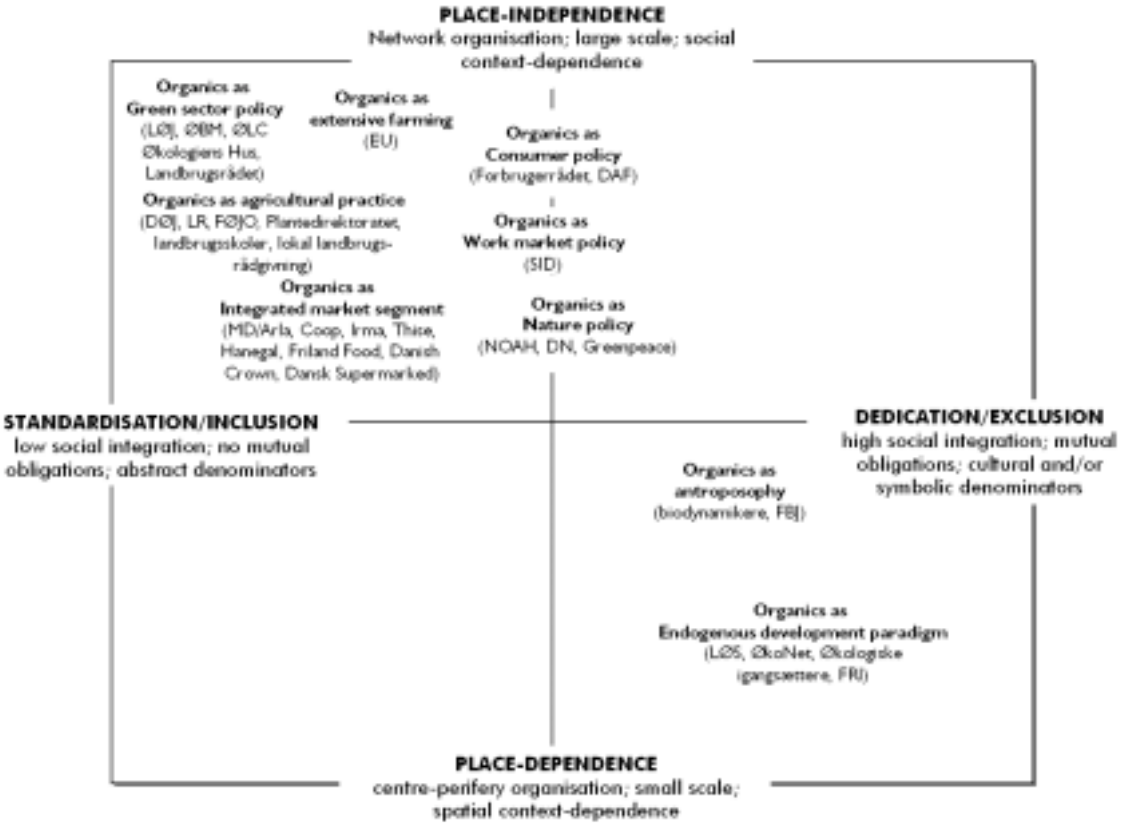
Figure 7: Agendas within the organic field 1980-1990



These processes should be seen in relation to the fact that organic farming gained interest from the political sector during the period. The most important event in that regard was the introduction of the Danish government approved, red organic label in 1987, which in the following years was of vital importance for the relatively early entry of organic food into the Danish retail chains. The government-lead approval of organic food in 1987 was the culmination of a process where different political actors had introduced organic farming as an agricultural policy tool (Ingemann, 2003a).

One of the assumptions behind this was organic farming was seen as a viable strategy to pursue for small- or medium scale farmers, thereby achieving a higher degree of diversification of the structural development of agriculture. But organic was in market terms still a niche production and the supply of organic food was highly dependent on specific shop owners or certain retail chains and certain stores within these. In that regard, there was still a high degree of dependence on particular places.

Figure 8: Agendas within the organic field 1990-2000

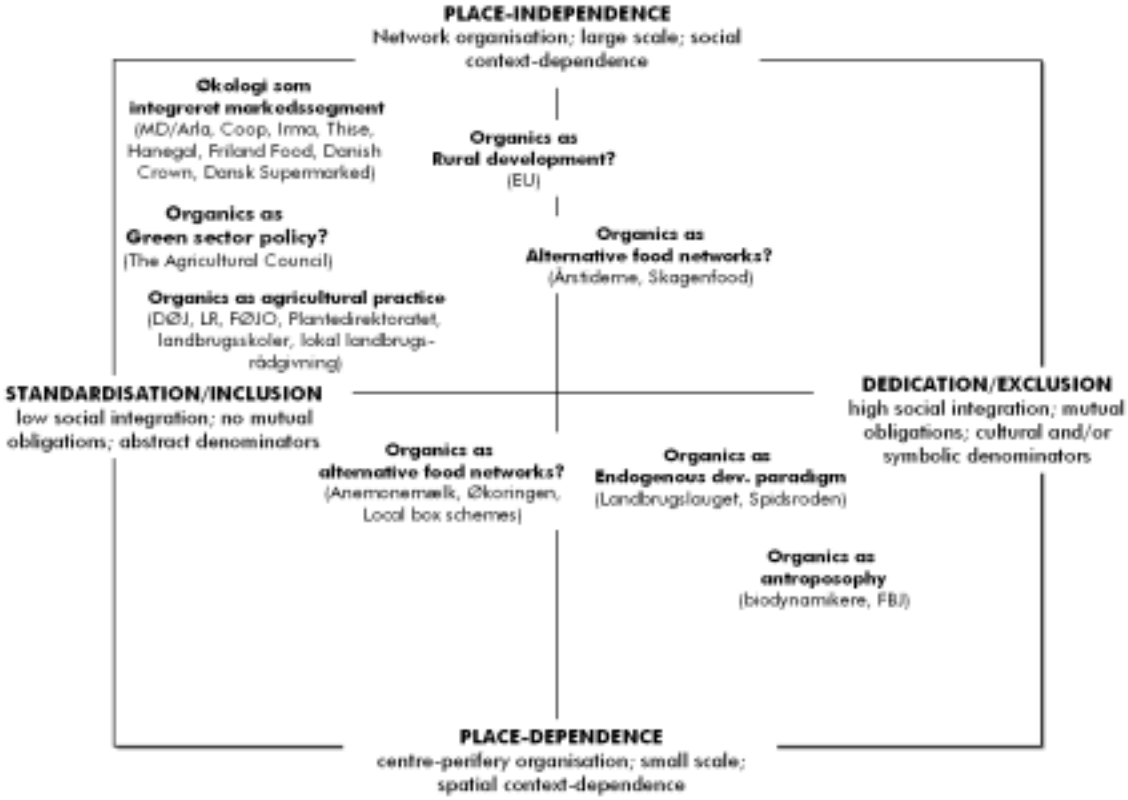


The 1990s was characterized by a rapid development of the organic food sector. During this period, organic food became an integrated part of the Danish food market. The Danish market for organic food went from less than one percent of the total food market at the start of the decade and on to a share of roughly five percent in 1999 (ØL, 2003). The organic lobby organizations also experienced a process of inclusion into the conventional food sector, most clearly marked by their entry into the Danish Agricultural Council[i] in the late 1990s. This process can partly be explained as a result of conventional agriculture's interest in organic farming as a policy instrument in agricultural environmental politics[ii] (Ingemann, 2002). Other political actors also showed a significant interest in organic agriculture, such as labour unions (SID, 1995a; SID, 1995b), consumer organizations and environmental movements. Still, the interest of these organizations did not lead to any lasting alliances, which otherwise would have coupled issues and agendas from consumer policy, work market policy and nature policy into the organic mainstream.

The rapid increase of the size of the organic market was the major event which took place during the 1990s, but what was equally significant was that the size of the market has not expanded since then. The level of 5% which was obtained in 1999, has not moved upwards since then (ØL, 2003). The developments which have taken place within the new millennium seem to have mostly been reallo-

cations within a market of a fixed size. What is significant for the evolution of the organic market since 1999 is the entry of new alternative organic food networks, especially the web-based (e-commerce) box scheme Aarstiderne[iii]. In 2004, Aarstiderne alone accounts for half of the total turnover for alternative organic food networks (which is still fairly small, still less than 1% of the total Danish food market) (Kjeldsen, 2005). Aarstiderne primarily supplies the organic market in the Danish capitol Copenhagen. Following the entry of Aarstiderne, some of the small-scale sales outlets in Copenhagen, such as farmers markets, are being shut down, indicating an increasing competition within the 'alternative' market. In the same period other 'alternative' networks enter the field. Networks such as Skagenfood[iv], Anemonemælk[v], Økoringen[vi] and others, are all based on e-commerce and extensive use of the web as the main interface with the consumers. Some new cooperatives also enter the field. The first consumer-owned farm in Denmark, Landbrugslauget[vii], is being initiated in 2001. This cooperative consists of 500 consumers, who bought shares in a farm south of Copenhagen. The activists behind the project also started a cooperative sales outlet, Spidsroden[viii], in Copenhagen in cooperation with activists from the Danish Autonomous Movement. Both of these projects started out as being collectively organised and they differ from the conventional Danish agricultural cooperatives in being consumer-driven and rooted outside the agricultural sector.

Figure 9: Agendas within the organic field 2003-2004

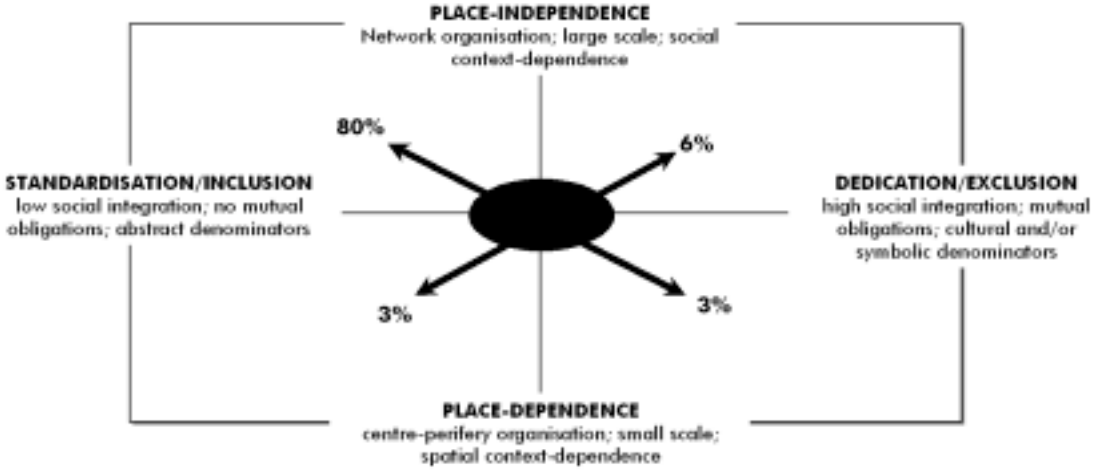


There seems thus to be some indication of a renewed diversification within the organic field in the new millennium, coupled with increased competition and an increase in scale of the 'alternative' enterprises.

Discussion

When looking only at the development of the Danish market on macro level, one could say that the conventionalisation hypothesis is partly right, since up to 80% of all organic products are sold through supermarkets and retail chains, leaving roughly around 12% of the market to alternative distribution channels like farmer's markets, on-farm shops and box schemes (ØL, 2003). If these numbers are transferred to the analysis model used earlier, the by far largest share of the market is in the upper left part of the model.

Figure 10: Distribution of the organic turnover 2004
(Kjeldsen, 2005)



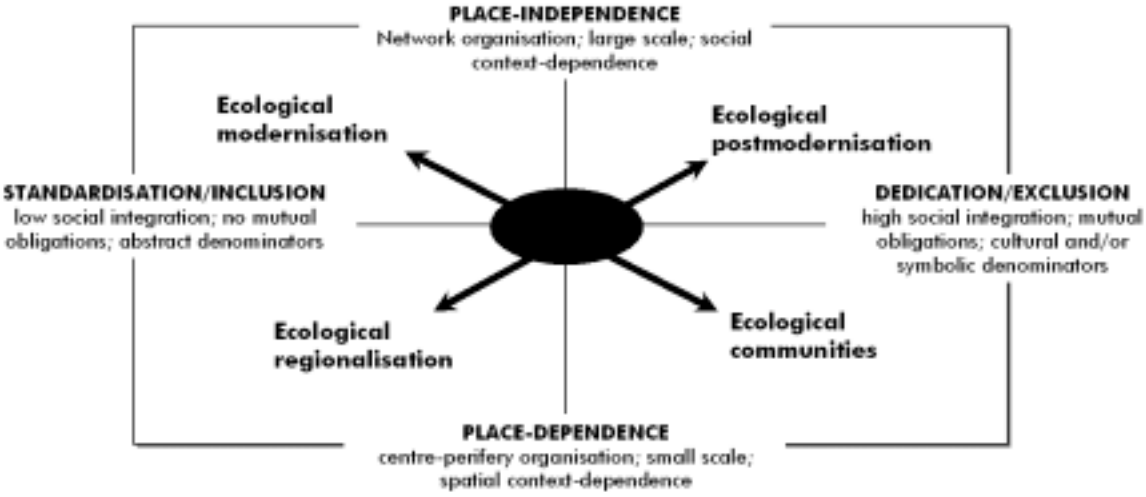
Considering that the same model used on the 1980s would have yielded the opposite results, this is a quite radical shift. It is also obvious that the radical agendas of the hippies and anti-capitalists have completely vanished from the mainstream. But does this necessarily mean that the organic field of today is a less social enterprise than earlier? Still, we think it would be an error to resolve to a dichomisation of the social and the economical, since the recent developments indicate that the organic field is evolving into new economic spaces. The emergence of new economic spaces within the organic field was investigated in one of the author's Ph.D. project through case studies of some of the new emerging food networks on the Danish organic market (Kjeldsen, 2005). The cases studies are marked with dotted lines in the model below.

Figure 11: Selected alternative and conventional food networks present within the organic field in the new millennium
(Kjeldsen, 2005)

Some of the conclusions from the project were that the place-dependent food networks were characterised by poor economic performance due to a limited turnover and a relatively low degree of specialisation which gave rise to uneven distributions of workloads and risks among the actors involved. There was nothing to indicate that these networks could obtain more socially just, economically viable and environmentally beneficial social practice than the other types of networks studied. This is in accord with some of the issues identified in other reviews of 'localised', 'short' food chain initiatives (Hinrichs, 2000; Winter, 2003; Kjeldsen & Alrøe, 2006), which points towards that a high degree of social integration and local scale is no guarantee for the realisation of progressive social or environmental objectives. Because of their exclusive character these types of projects will only have a limited potential as alternatives on a larger scale, and they can not be considered more 'authentic' just because of their degree of exclusivity. In the same manner, they can not be considered as a more 'social' enterprise than others.

In that regard, there were more promising perspectives in the business model of Aarstiderne.com. On the basis of what can be termed radical time-space compressing technologies like e-commerce and credit cards and web-based communication technologies, they have managed to reach an economically viable scale and to reach a group of consumers who are spatially distant from the organic producers. A high degree of communication with the consumers has been facilitated by the use of weblogs, newsletters and monthly focus group interviews with randomly selected customers. Some of the most recent projects within the enterprise are the development of a Danish Fair Trade concept. In that regard, the enterprise has been able to actualise a social innovation, which is no less 'social' than the other projects. The success of Aarstiderne.com highlights the important role of technology and its influence on forging new links between producers and consumers in a context where consumers and producers do not inhabit the same absolute spaces. The new means of consumption, or as Giddens would term them, disembedding mechanisms, is a vital resource for opening up new organic economic spaces. What is interesting is that, the other alternative networks, which were classified as being more standardised and regionally embedded, also utilised new means of consumption compared to the place-dependent initiatives.

Figur 12: Development paths within the organic field
(Kjeldsen, 2005)



In relation to the initial questions behind this study, the relational perspective has some important implications. It puts much more focus on the forging of social relations and makes it more obvious to focus on the development of organic food networks as *social innovation*. In that regard, it is important to underline that social innovation is a continuous process, which is the outcome of relations between actors within food networks, as well as between food networks. That means that development can not be approached as a binary variable between social and non-social innovation. In line with Bourdieu and his view of capital as being inter-substitutable, it is important to stress that the type of social innovation can change, without making it less 'social'.

- Generally social innovation is not an activity which ends at some point, where you reach the goal. In order to pursue the goal, actors must be in constant movement, since their environments constantly change.
- Social innovation creates something 'new' and 'alternative'. Unless exclusivity is a goal in it self for the actors involved, they will try to make it more inclusive or 'conventional'.
- As alternatives evolve the networks in their environment change in relation to them and incorporate parts of the 'alternative', thus adding new meanings to the term 'conventional'. New experiences, possibilities and constraints emerge and with them the possibility of new 'alternatives'.
- The conventionalisation hypothesis is wrong in the sense that it tends to portray the historical development as the 'fall of organics' where the core values are being perverted. Values continue to play an important role as a resource for innovations within the field.

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Notes

[i] The Agricultural Council is put together by representatives from all Danish Agricultural Association and is the central lobby organisation for Danish agriculture

[ii] The interest was and maybe still is, relatively ambivalent; on one hand organic agriculture forms a radical critique of conventional agriculture, but on the other hand can an extensification through growing organic in parts of the sector leave ecological space for the most intensive farming enterprises in conventional agriculture. Ingemann, J. H. (2002). Agricultural Policy. *Consensus, cooperation and conflict : the policy making process in Denmark*. Jørgensen, H. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar**:** 210-225.

[iii] www.aarstiderne.com

[iv] www.skagenfood.dk

[v] www.anemonemaelk.dk

[vi] www.oekoringen.dk

[vii] www.landbrugslauget.dk

[viii] www.spidsroden.dk